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ABSTRACT

A national symposium on policy and practice in preparation of teachers for children and youth with disabilities focused on the alignment of three components of teacher preparation: professional teaching standards, licensure of beginning teachers of students with disabilities, and the state approval/accreditation processes for teacher preparation programs. Its goals were to help the 29 state teams attending the symposium to clarify the issues within each of these state-level components and support development of State Action Plans. Action Plans identify activities to be undertaken in a state to align state-adopted professional teaching standards with the procedures for approval/accreditation of teacher preparation programs and for teacher licensing. A report on the synthesis and analysis of state team pre-symposium planning surveys is followed by five conclusions of the symposium including: (1) states face serious challenges in communication, collaboration, and knowledge sharing across stakeholder groups within their own states; and (2) there is a lack of common understandings across states and within state stakeholder groups about what professional standards are and how they relate to the alignment process. In addition, although states lacked clarity in their understanding of the alignment process before the symposium began, a more congruent understanding emerged by the end of the symposium. (DB)

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ED 461 241

Developing the Special Education Workforce

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM: POLICY AND PRACTICE TO ENSURE HIGH QUALITY TEACHERS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES JUNE 2001

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Executive Summary

Proceedings of the National Symposium: Policy and Practice to Ensure High Quality Teachers for Children and Youth with Disabilities June 2001

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U. S. Department of Education Project Officer Martha B. Bokee

Purpose and Organization of the Symposium

The National Symposium: Policy and Practice to Ensure High Quality Teachers for Children and Youth with Disabilities convened at The Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C., on June 8 - 10, 2001. Its sponsors were the National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education (Clearinghouse), the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), and The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). Collaborating partners included the Interstate New Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC), National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

The National Symposium focused on the alignment of three components of teacher preparation–professional teaching standards, licensure of beginning teachers of students with disabilities, and the state approval/accreditation processes for teacher preparation programs. Its goals were to provide clarification of the issues and challenges within each of these state-level components, as well as to support the development of State Action Plans by State Alignment Planning Teams (State Teams). The Action Plans identified activities to be undertaken in a state to align state-adopted professional teaching standards with the procedures for approval/accreditation of teacher preparation programs and for teacher licensing. The premise of the National Symposium was that teachers prepared within systems that aligned state licensing standards and state approval/accreditation processes for teacher preparation programs with professional teaching standards would enter classrooms highly qualified to instruct children and youth with disabilities and to increase results for those students.

State Directors of Special Education led the State Teams composed of at least four required members. These included the State Director of Special Education, the State Director of Teacher Licensing, the State Director of the Office overseeing approval/accreditation of teacher preparation programs, and a Dean of Education. Other relevant persons could be included at the Team Leader's discretion. If State Teams registered with requisite members by February 23, 2001, the Clearinghouse provided the team with $1,750 to defray travel costs. Teams registering after that date received $1,500. A total of 29 teams attended. There was no registration fee for State Teams or for individuals attending but not associated with a State Team. The total number of Symposium participants was 308.

State Teams completed a Pre-Symposium Planning Survey (Survey) that addressed the status of alignment of teacher preparation processes in their respective state. The State Team Leader then returned the completed Survey to the Clearinghouse prior to the Symposium. A synthesis of each state's Survey was prepared for the State Team's use during work sessions at the Symposium. The synthesis was organized into five categories of information, including 1) the process of alignment, 2) self-evaluation of degree of alignment, 3) needs that must be addressed to further the alignment process, 4) barriers to alignment, and 5) resources that can be utilized to address alignment.

The State Teams used a prepared Action Plan template to derive benchmarks that identified action steps, resources available, resources needed, and additional persons to involve. Benchmarks were related to a five-stage Benchmark Alignment Model created by the Clearinghouse staff in collaboration with Institutions of Higher Education, State Departments of Education, and relevant Educational Associations.

An assigned Facilitator assisted each State Team during the course of the Symposium. In preparation for the four State Team work sessions the Facilitators were given 1) general guidance in the Benchmark Alignment Model, 2) access to the materials sent to each State Team Leader from March - May 2001, and 3) a copy of the assigned state-specific synthesis. Facilitators received a $500 honorarium, reimbursement of some of their travel expenses, and hotel accommodations if living beyond a 50-mile radius of Washington, DC.

Report on the Synthesis and Analysis of State Team Pre-Symposium Planning Surveys/Syntheses and Action Plans

State Team Pre-Symposium Planning Surveys/Syntheses

Data collected across all components of the Surveys/Syntheses show more than 75 percent of states attending the Symposium have established alliances with teacher preparation stakeholders including higher education faculty, general and special education teachers, and administrators. These alliances often include persons already involved in governance structures that oversee policy-making and enforcement of state regulations related to components of the alignment process. They could be expected, therefore, to have the potential to influence and support activities that foster the alignment process. Twenty-one of the 29 states attending acknowledged that their professional teaching standards were based on nationally recognized

standards, and 20 states noted that those standards were linked to licensure and/or program approval or accreditation.

State Team Pre-Symposium Planning Surveys identified improving communications as the most frequent area of *need* with regard to the alignment process. Conversely, the Surveys identified communications as the most prevalent *barrier* to alignment.

Action Plans

Twenty-seven states completed and submitted Action Plans. Those plans include 63 benchmarks. The number of benchmarks per team ranged from one to five with an average of slightly less than two per team. The dominant category of benchmarks included those addressing direct alignment of the three teacher preparation components. Benchmarks that addressed issues of supply and demand were the next most numerous.

The strongest theme among action steps to achieve the benchmarks was that of collaboration. Teams identified collaboration as essential to accomplishing the related benchmark. Twenty-six of the 27 State Plans listed specific personnel, staff, or offices as available resources. They also noted that funding, other specific support personnel, and support from specific stakeholders are resources that were needed for success in reaching the benchmark.

Conclusions

Five conclusions were derived from the synthesis and analysis of data from the State Team Pre-Symposium Surveys/Syntheses and Action Plans.

States face serious challenges in communication, collaboration, and knowledge sharing across stakeholder groups within their own states.

As noted earlier, the most common need reported from states in their Surveys/Syntheses was communication. This theme included references to communication among stakeholder groups, within departments of education, and across the various participant groups within governing structures that address issues of teacher quality. In addition, time to collaborate with one another to sort out differences, articulate common

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understandings, and share knowledge across constituencies within a state was high on the states' lists of needs in both Surveys/Syntheses and Action Plans.

Several states reported that although the willingness to collaborate was present, the time and availability for thoughtful discussion was not. Several states' Surveys/Syntheses indicated that although the lines of communication were open within a department of education and its constituent groups, there was a lack of structures (i.e., collaborative committees across departments) that allowed for meaningful dialogue to conceive solutions to barriers that impeded progress toward alignment. This lack of time and structures to cultivate effective communication appeared also to impede the development of new and innovative solutions to alignment. This need for time to collaborate was addressed in some of the Action Plans, as State Teams targeted efforts to establish intra-departmental committees. Action Plans also indicated that State Team members see themselves now as resources for one other and, at least in some cases, envision the team itself as generating next steps in the alignment process.

There is a lack of common understandings across states and within state stakeholder groups about what professional standards are and how they relate to the alignment process.

When asked how professional standards were developed, 12 states indicated on their State Survey/Synthesis that they had used a process that involved a wide stakeholder group that was guided by nationally recognized standards (i.e., NCATE, CEC, INTASC, and National Board for Professional Teaching Standards). These states met over an extended period of time. However, other State Surveys/Syntheses, when examined carefully, revealed that many states referred to nationally recognized accreditation standards alone in describing their professional standards. These states indicated that their process of alignment consisted of adopting national accreditation standards for their teacher preparation programs and then stipulating completion of these programs to serve as the requirement for licensure. When viewed within the alignment model proposed, this latter group of states began by adopting accreditation standards. It is doubtful that these states had developed a separate set of overarching professional standards that was then used to create alignment with both licensure and accreditation processes and procedures.

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The 12 state Surveys/Syntheses that described their professional standards as a separable common set of knowledge and skills/teacher competencies appeared to have a more thorough understanding of the role of professional standards in the alignment process. Rather than beginning by adopting a set of regulations for program approval/accreditation as their state's professional standards, these states began by developing a set of knowledge and skills. That set of knowledge and skills was gleaned from standards written by nationally recognized groups, using state-based stakeholder groups of K-12 practitioners, higher education faculty, parents, appropriate community members, as well as state level officials and task forces designed to govern the development of both accreditation and licensing standards. Having sets of knowledge and skills drawn from broadly based relevant sources, the 12 states were able to address their state-specific issues, such as socioeconomic factors and political climates or considerations while, at the same time, incorporating nationally recognized standards.

For these 12 states, then, professional standards development went beyond a set of regulations for licensure or accreditation. Professional standards development included a separable, broader, and overarching set of knowledge and skills that drove revisions in existing governance and monitoring structures for licensing and accreditation.

It appears, therefore, that a more common and broader understanding of what professional standards are and how they should be developed and used to drive teacher education reform is needed both across and within many states.

In some states, there is an ongoing reliance on traditional types of governance for alignment processes. This reliance may impede innovative approaches needed to attain total alignment, as reflected in Stage Three of the Benchmark Alignment Model

For some states, Surveys/Syntheses indicated that existing traditional governance structures for licensure and state program approval/accreditation processes had remained unchanged. Furthermore, there were indications that the existence of these structures, such as State

Boards of Education, Boards of Higher Education, or Offices overseeing teacher licensure within the State Department of Education, may have unintentionally impeded the process of reform. This impediment may have occurred as efforts toward alignment in personnel preparation were undertaken around these traditional structures. Other data reported in these Surveys/Syntheses indicated that these states were not using, as a foundation for alignment, an overarching set of professional teaching standards based on a broad-based set of common knowledge and skills. Rather, these states had adapted a set of accreditation standards that were being used as professional teaching standards and requirements for licensure. Therefore, states that retained existing, more traditional governance structures around teacher preparation and did not demonstrate a fresh look at professional standards generated from a broad stakeholder group, indicated less successful attempts at alignment and, therefore, less successful efforts to restructure old paradigms about teacher education.

Some states need to re-address their foundation for professional teaching standards in order to achieve total alignment.

At least 15 states that attended the Symposium did not indicate they had developed a separable set of overarching professional teaching standards that were foundational to the alignment process. Data did suggest, however, that those states adopted nationally recognized standards for either licensure or teacher education program approval/ accreditation and referred to them as their professional teaching standards. They had not gone through a process of shared stakeholder decision-making to create a separable set of knowledge and skills for what teachers need to know and be able to do in classrooms.

States that had developed a separable set of professional standards through a stakeholder process and positioned the standards as foundational to the process of teacher education reform were further along in their alignment process and more involved in substantive work on licensure and program approval/accreditation processes that addressed those standards. Of the twelve states that developed a separate set of professional standards, more than half indicated they were ready to work toward Stages Four and Five in the Benchmark Alignment Model. These stages include evaluation of the impact of alignment on achievement of students and development of

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interstate agreements that facilitate interstate reciprocity. Within states that developed a separable set of professional standards through a stakeholder process, those that reported development of alternative routes to certification (ARC) programs reported little difficulty in developing ARC's that met the same rigorous standards required of more traditional teacher preparation programs. These states also reported more success working with large stakeholder groups, as well as more experience with state-created boards and commissions that helped govern the teacher preparation and licensing process.

In contrast, states that had not developed a separable set of professional standards reported a greater need for communication, time to collaborate, and difficulty in the change process itself. These states also reported continued use of established governance structures that were perceived to impede the development of teacher education reform initiatives in their state.

Although states lacked clarity in their understanding of the alignment process before the Symposium began, a more congruent understanding emerged by the end of the Symposium.

Information from States' Surveys/Syntheses prior to the Symposium indicated that all states were involved in initiatives related to professional standards, licensure, and program approval/accreditation for teacher preparation programs. However, a number of these states demonstrated a perception of alignment that did not incorporate the relationship of the three alignment components to one another, as shown in Step Three of the Benchmark Model of Alignment. Data from the Action Plans of 20 of the states that attended the Symposium indicated that pre-Symposium perceptions of alignment became more congruent with the Benchmark Alignment Model as State Teams used the information presented at the Symposium to develop their alignment benchmarks.

While the results of the State Teams' work during the Symposium created a road map for aligning processes that must be synchronized to produce high quality teachers committed to a career teaching children and youth with disabilities, they are first steps. They allowed the states that participated to move forward with a common framework for preparing

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teachers of quality. Likewise, the Symposium was a first step in thinking nationally about the issues and research associated with creating high quality teachers for students with great needs. While states must ultimately continue the momentum and synergy of the Symposium, the Clearinghouse is committed to and will work to support states in their effort to achieve the benchmarks they established in their Action Plans.

List of States that Participated in the National Symposium:

Great Lakes Region
Illinois
Iowa
Minnesota
Missouri
Ohio
Pennsylvania

Mid-South Region:
Delaware
Kentucky
Maryland
North Carolina
South Carolina
Virginia
West Virginia

Mountain Plains Region:
Arizona
Montana
New Mexico
North Dakota
Utah

Northeast Region:
Connecticut
New Hampshire
New York
Rhode Island

Southeast Region
Alabama
Arkansas
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Georgia
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Texas

Western Region
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